

die so they could squander what money I have left;
then when I do die, come back reincarnated as a dung
beetle.

A: Well, I've got to go. Call you tomorrow — if I
make it home.

B: Good to see you. I'll be here — if I last the night.

HONEY, I'M BACK

here in the Cottage of Suspended Desires.
After two weeks in the Mansion of Agonizing Need,
what a relief to sink, clam-like, into this worn chair
and not think of the hammocks and peeled grapes
and dancing girls limber as ferns,
which are the good points of the Mansion,
the bad being that the girls are lesbians,
can run faster than I,
and have razor blades in all my favorite spots.

With any luck I'll just stay here,
lulled by the scent of last night's casserole,
sipping warm beer and looking forward
to the postman's bringing
the occasional ad for auto parts
or a limited edition set of pewter frogs,
but no more tickets to the Mansion
or the House of Desperate Longing,
no maps leading to the Palace of Skull-Crunching Despair.

GATHER YE ROSEBUDS WHILE YE MAY (BUT WATCH FOR PLASTIQUE
PETALS)

The worst thing about disasters
is not that they're so bad,
but that they're so damned unexpected.
I don't mean popular stuff:
the Big California Quake,
or standing on Ground Zero,
or even learning that your latest
headache is brain cancer. I
mean you're in your livingroom
watching The Love Boat,
when a runaway freight train
cuts off your legs;

you're
thirty feet from your apartment

in your rented Porsche, and you
make the turn you've made
a thousand times, but this one
time you clip a fire-hydrant,
which blows like Old Faithful,
your car's rear end falls off,
you forgot to buy insurance,
and a drenched mafia hit-man
is standing right there, scowling
at it all.

Somewhere, sometime,
someone cooking dinner got his brains
splattered by a meteor; and though
they always say "You have more
chance of being hit by lightning . . .,"
someone has been hit by it,
or stepped on a live grenade
in his back yard, or been crushed
by a falling pop machine,
after kicking it, trying to get
back the quarter it just screwed
him out of.

Right this minute
I've got whiplash suffered
listening to the Lakers
in my parked car. I know
a guy who broke his back
slipping on a Rhinoceros Beetle;
a guy who cut his prick off
by accidentally closing it
in his dresser drawer.

So,
when you say that you like
sex with me "too much,"
and think about me "much
too much," and even think
we should "back off," get "less
involved," it makes me crazed.
My suggestion, my sweet
but timid love, is that you
tell me what you like the most,
and let me do it

now
and every chance we get,
before the bomb an insane
woodcarver stashed in your four-
poster explodes, or your sheets
spontaneously combust, or
the first verified flying

saucer in earth's history
crash-lands below your panty-
line, seconds before my tongue.

BOB

Everyone laughed at the horse's name:
Bob. They laughed louder
to learn it was my turtle's name —
or possibly, to learn I have a turtle.
I laughed too, remembering April
days in Houston, finding turtles
in the woods as spring broke open
like a sweet red melon.

Rich
as Scrooge McDuck, I rode around,
bike basket full of turtles. I
built elevators to my treehouse for them,
ran up and down my backyard,
swooping turtles through the air
with wing-feet flailing, routing
Nazis to the Stars and Stripes
Forever.

Even in 1955,
I knew that there was something
fine, something primarily decent
about turtles: their slow walk
and patient eyes, the gentle
way they nipped their apple-cores
and lettuce, licking with their ancient
tongues.

The 50s changed to 60s,
70s, and 80s. Heroes changed
from strong and silent to flashy
and loud — Muhammad Ali, John McEnroe,
Prince. I quietly watched
the Apotheosis of the Asshole, and kept
turtles: tolerant, easy, fearless
enough to crawl off tables, tough
enough to hit the floor and walk away.

The starting gun blasted. Bob
stumbled from the gate, dead last.
halfway around the track, he was
still last. "A turtle," I moaned.
"I bet on a fucking turtle."
My friends were still laughing